

# SYNTHESIS ASSIGNMENT & ACTION PLAN

## PART ONE: LEARNING COMMUNITY PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- A. List the key learning outcomes for your learning community program, taking into consideration your team responses to *College Learning for the New Global Century* and your institution's stated mission. These outcomes characterize what you hope students will experience in all learning community program offerings on your campus.

The University takes a broad view of what constitutes a learning community, but all activities that are denoted as learning communities must address

- having clearly delineated academic and social goals
- involving faculty and academic staff
- having the support of the responsible administrative unit(s)
- having a well thought-out plan to assess the achievement of the academic and social goals

### **Vision for WSU learning communities:**

*To support Wayne State University's commitment to student learning, the Learning Community initiative seeks to enhance our undergraduates' experience by providing all interested students dynamic, focused communities in which students, staff, and faculty can learn and grow together.*

For Fall, 2008, we have twenty-eight (28) different learning communities, each with its own specific learning outcomes that support the vision of the program. Each program proposal must address:

- fostering an integrated curriculum in which course content is connected and course participants interact.
- building strong, collaborative partnerships between academic and student support services.
- developing Learning Teams for students, to help link related courses and foster academic achievement.
- promoting innovative pedagogy and collaborative curriculum development that may incorporate service learning, interdisciplinary teams, cooperative learning strategies, out of class learning connections, and other curricular innovations.

All programs must have

- specific, comprehensive assessment plan that addresses clearly articulated, intended learning outcomes for students.
- a well-defined plan for peer mentors.
- plans for sustainability including college and/or departmental financial support

**Over all, the following learning objectives cover much of the range of the specific objectives of the various programs**

- **Developing critical thinking skills**
- **Improving ability to apply knowledge and solve problems**
- **Making appropriate use of student services**
- **Developing ability to collaborate with others**
- **Experiencing a successful transition to university and successfully identifying and pursuing their goals**

B. Reflect on students' experiences of learning in your current learning community (or in courses that will be included in your proposed learning community). The practices named are drawn from research on effective learning community practice and are likely to make the biggest difference for students.

GOOD PRACTICE	<i>How present is this?</i>	<i>How can this be strengthened?</i>
Discussion groups and seminars integrate learning across learning community classes	Attended to well across the many programs	<p>We will address the first four of these practices explicitly as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty and seminar leaders engage in coordinated curriculum planning</li> <li>• Incorporate specific questions about outcomes into the assessment and providing workshops to facilitate discussion</li> <li>• Develop a formative assessment process – share and analyze data</li> <li>• Incorporate these best practices explicitly into the proposal process</li> <li>• Complete summative evaluations through annual reports</li> </ul>
Assignments explicitly integrate materials across courses	In development but still variable across programs	
Out-of-class experiences are a required part of the learning community	Widely incorporated	
Class time is frequently devoted to active and collaborative learning across disciplines, perspectives, areas of expertise	Varies widely – some make extensive use and others do not use it at all	
Students regularly interact with other students in the learning community and develop strong relationships with faculty	Widely incorporated	
Instructors emphasize deep learning—a focus on big ideas/ conceptions and key practices	Mostly not incorporated	
Instructors introduce foundational academic skills in the context of meaningful tasks	Widely incorporated	
Students are involved in the social construction of knowledge around genuine questions, multiple perspectives, understanding of self and others	In development but variable across programs	

C. Draft a short letter that can be used on websites/letters/syllabi—perhaps just one paragraph—addressed to students, introducing them to your learning community program. Begin “Dear Students...”

DEAR STUDENTS:

Welcome! Be a part of something GREAT! Learning Communities at Wayne State University are a wonderful way to get to know Wayne State; you will transition easily into life in college and learn to be a successful student, while learning to addressing important questions that impact our world.

### **What is a Learning Community?**

A Learning Community gives you the advantages of a small college learning environment with the resources of a major research university. In Learning Communities, small groups of students with similar interests work closely together as a “community of learners” along with faculty and staff. You will work with advanced student mentors we call *peer mentors* and a faculty advisor, to study, socialize, and problem-solve together. Most likely, your entire group will take at least one course together, and you might all live on the same floor of a residence hall.

### **Why Join a Learning Community?**

When you join a Learning Community, you’ll be part of an innovative program that integrates courses with the campus experience. With your student peer mentors and faculty advisor, you’ll:

- Learn a lot and achieve success from the start
- Develop problem solving, critical thinking and leadership skills through your interactions with others
- More easily explore your academic interests – whether you’re sure of your major or are still deciding, you’ll have the opportunity within your peer network to explore your options
- Form new friendships, which will give you support in your new environment

Welcome to the Wayne State community!

⇒ **WEDNESDAY ASSIGNMENT DUE AT 8:15 PM, SEM II B, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR TABLE**

## **PART TWO: CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS SUPPORTING LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

A. Partnerships between student support services and learning community faculty

GOOD PRACTICE	<i>How present is this?</i>	<i>How can this be strengthened?</i>
Student support services staff and learning community faculty share a sense of purpose about the learning community program		
Student support services staff and learning community faculty periodically meet to discuss implementation, growth, and recruitment issues		
Students in the learning communities meet people who provide campus support, including counseling and financial aid		
Students in the learning communities develop relationships with advisors that can extend past their learning community experience		
Student support services staff and learning community faculty regularly discuss factors that jeopardize student success, including the need for on-campus jobs, child care, access to emergency loans, etc.		
Student support services staff are part of learning community teaching teams or assigned to learning community programs as appropriate on your campus		

B. Ongoing professional development opportunities for learning community faculty *and staff*

GOOD PRACTICE	<i>How present is this?</i>	<i>How can it be strengthened?</i>
Programs that support faculty teaching in learning communities <i>and support staff</i> are integrated with existing professional development opportunities on campus	Not incorporated	
Members of learning community teams have opportunities to meet informally with each other (built into their teaching assignments)	Not formalized Occurs in individual learning communities	
Learning community program faculty <i>and staff</i> have opportunities to meet together for professional development, including work related to curriculum planning, pedagogy, and program assessment	Not incorporated	

- WSU will have an American Council on Education Fellow whose expertise is the scholarship of teaching and learning. Organize a series of learning community best practice activities through the Office for Teaching and Learning. Publicize broadly and specifically engage current learning community faculty and staff.
- We already have 25-35 faculty involved. Enhance faculty participation by an “each-one-bring-one” concept.
- Develop a program for sending people to conferences (get college matches)
  - Faculty and staff who have papers or presentations
  - Put faculty and staff learning groups together to experience learning communities conferences together – have them meet all year round
- Develop a professional development grant program
- Hold a two-day Learning Communities Summit in the February
  - National speaker(s)
  - Faculty and staff learning groups report out
  - Present best practice
  - Poster session with students and peer mentors
  - Share assessment data
- One half- to one-day Winter (in December) and Summer (in May) planning activity for new and continuing learning community faculty and staff.
  - Successes and challenges
  - Analyzing data
  - Curriculum discussion
- Develop a more coherent and planful professional development for peer mentors
  - Include peer mentors in other professional development activities

C. Learning community coordinating committee

GOOD PRACTICE	<i>How present is this?</i>	<i>How can it be strengthened?</i>
A learning community coordinating committee which includes both faculty and student support services staff is recognized by the college	Exists but not widely recognized nor very active	
The process for becoming a member or leader of the coordinating committee is transparent, and related responsibilities are figured into workload	Fully incorporated	
The learning community coordinating committee meets regularly to discuss all aspects of the learning community program	Needs development	

- Activities in Part B will raise awareness
- Steering committee will become more formalized and active
  - Focus on professional development
  - Future planning
  - Assessment
  - Become more formally recognized in the colleges and schools
- Develop a sub-committee structure engaging other faculty, staff, and peer mentors beyond the Steering Committee
  - Will carry out the main work and report to Steering Committee

#### D. Administrative support

GOOD PRACTICE	<i>How present is this?</i>	<i>How can it be strengthened?</i>
Administrators take the lead in solving logistical and organizational issues related to implementing learning communities	Fully incorporated	
Administrators work in collaboration with learning community faculty and staff to ensure necessary support	Varied	
Administrators lead efforts to connect learning community program with institutional mission and most pressing student needs (including curricular trouble spots)	On-going effort	

- Enhance college and departmental administrative engagement
  - Get them engaged in the Plan B activities – awareness and knowledge
  - Increase their formal financial commitment - identify the potential cost-benefit of their learning community investments
- Increase effectiveness of curricular connections
  - Better coordination of course offerings to incorporate course clustering and co-scheduling across disciplines
  - Enhanced mathematics achievement – better coordination with learning community efforts
  - Greater involvement of General Education Oversight Committee with learning community best practice – get them to participate in the Plan B activities

#### E. Assessment

GOOD PRACTICE	<i>How present is this?</i>	<i>How can it be strengthened?</i>
The learning community program as a whole articulates desired student learning outcomes	Significant	
Individual learning community courses describe particular outcomes relative to shared program outcomes	Varied	
Students are regularly asked to reflect on experiences of learning	Not well-developed	
Faculty regularly discuss students' work and implications for subsequent assignment design	Not well-developed	
Assessment practices draw on quantitative and qualitative methods	Both present to some degree	
Professional development is informed by ongoing assessments	Not well-developed – done on a individual	

	learning community basis	
Assessment results are reported out to wider campus community	Reported to Board of Governors on a programmatic level Some individual learning communities report in annual reports, newsletters, etc.	

- Incorporate specific questions about learning outcomes into annual assessment and provide workshops to facilitate discussion
- Use learning outcomes as a criteria for future funding
- Develop a formative assessment process – share and analyze data
  - Will be a component of the bi-annual planning sessions (December and May)
- Include assessment in the annual Summit agenda (February)
- Continue training and hold people accountable for using the STARS (student tracking system) data base
- Incorporate curricular best practices explicitly into the proposal process

⇒ **THURSDAY ASSIGNMENT DUE AT 6:00 PM, SEM II B, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR TABLE**

### PART THREE: TWO-YEAR PLAN AND TIMELINE

#### A. Vision for your learning community program

What would you like your learning community program to be known for two years from now, and what will be different for students because of your efforts?

*Learning Communities are widely known among students and faculty, and there is great interest in being part of the campus collaboration for learning. Learning community identity is focused on exciting and academically challenging learning goals. The university administration, Board of Governors, and community supporters see learning communities as a key, integrated component of student success.*

*First time, transfer, commuting, and residential students will be engaged in integrated experiences that enhance their learning and success. They will recognize and understand the value of their learning community experience as central to their college experience and development. They will have high expectations for themselves and will experience success.*

#### B. Scope of learning community initiative

<i>Current LC program</i>	<i>Fall 2010 LC program</i>
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Number of students involved: 1600 students	Number of students involved: 3000 (including first-year, transfer and upper division)
Number of faculty/student affairs professionals involved: 40 faculty 80 staff	Number of faculty/student affairs professionals involved: 100 faculty 120 staff
Courses, areas, or programs involved: 28 programs	Courses, areas, or programs involved: 40 programs

C. Select two “good practices” from Part One B, and up to five additional “good practices” from Part Two that—if strengthened—would most advance your learning community initiative.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Good practice(s) selected</i>
Students’ experiences of learning	Discussion groups and seminars integrate learning across learning community classes
Students’ experiences of learning	Assignments explicitly integrate materials across courses
Partnerships between student support services and learning community faculty	Student support services staff and learning community faculty share a sense of purpose about the learning community program
Ongoing professional development	Learning community program faculty <i>and staff</i> have opportunities to meet together for professional development, including work related to curriculum planning, pedagogy, and program assessment
Learning community coordinating committee	The learning community coordinating committee meets regularly to discuss all aspects of the learning community program <i>and receives reports from subcommittees</i>
Administrative support	Administrators lead efforts to connect learning community program with institutional mission and most pressing student needs (including curricular trouble spots)
Assessment	Assessment results are reported out <i>and used for continuous improvement</i>

D. Step-by-step organizing for success: what, how, by whom, and when

For each “good practice” your team has selected, figure out what in particular you want to have happen, and then identify the steps needed to get where you want to be by June 2010 including who needs to do what (team and campus colleagues) and the dates by which it needs to be done.

<i>Selected good practices</i>	<i>Where you want to be in two years' time</i>	<i>Steps to get there</i>	<i>Who will do what?</i>	<i>By when?</i>
Discussion groups and seminars integrate learning across learning community classes	First time, transfer, commuting, and residential students will be engaged in integrated experiences that enhance their learning and success.	- Expand core faculty participation Grass-roots recruitment Implement faculty development program Engage Faculty Retention Committee Engage Faculty Senate Committees - Implement Faculty-staff development plan	Operational=Administration  Subcommittee (broadly connected) OTL Provost Office/(IR)	Establish subcommittee, Fall 08 workshop, Summit 2/09, Spring 09 workshop  On going
Assignments explicitly integrate materials across courses	Fully implemented in initial stages (everyone should be doing it), and get more sophisticated over time	- Expand core faculty participation Grass-roots recruitment Implement faculty development program Engage Faculty Retention Committee Engage Faculty Senate Committees - Implement Faculty-staff development plan	Operational=Administration  Subcommittee (broadly connected) OTL Provost Office/(IR)	Establish subcommittee, Fall 08 workshop, Summit 2/09, Spring 09 workshop  On going
Student support services staff and learning community faculty share a sense of purpose about the learning community program	Learning community identity is focused on exciting and academically challenging learning goals.	Implement faculty/staff professional development opportunities	Operational=Administration  Subcommittee (broadly connected) OTL Provost Office/(IR)	Establish subcommittee, Fall 08 workshop, Summit 2/09, Spring 09 workshop  On going

<i>Selected good practices</i>	<i>Where you want to be in two years' time</i>	<i>Steps to get there</i>	<i>Who will do what?</i>	<i>By when?</i>
Learning community program faculty <i>and staff</i> have opportunities to meet together for professional development, including work related to curriculum planning, pedagogy, and program assessment	Learning Communities are widely known among students and faculty, and there is great interest in being part of the campus collaboration for learning	Subcommittee intact and functioning, structure functioning effectively	Steering Committee	May 09 and on-going
The learning community coordinating committee meets regularly to discuss all aspects of the learning community program <i>and receives reports from subcommittees</i>	Learning Communities are widely known among students and faculty, and there is great interest in being part of the campus collaboration for learning	Subcommittee intact and functioning, structure functioning effectively	Steering Committee Provost Office	By May 09 and on-going
Administrators lead efforts to connect learning community program with institutional mission and most pressing student needs (including curricular trouble spots)	The university administration, Board of Governors, and community supporters see learning communities as a key, integrated component of student success. First time, transfer, commuting, and residential students will be engaged in integrated experiences that enhance their learning and success.	Engage Deans BOG Provost Office Vice Presidents Academic Senate Student Svcs cttee	Steering Committee Provost Office	By May 09 and on-going
Assessment results are reported out <i>and used for continuous improvement</i>	Assessment committee will work with each individual LC to develop data collection, coaching LCs to develop/collect data, everybody should be looking at results and what to do to improve (data driven)	Assessment Plan	Assessment Committee	May 09

## PART FOUR: CAMPUS TEAM PRESENTATION

Please prepare for Friday's presentation with your "home audience" in mind—presenting to your cluster gives you a dress-rehearsal opportunity before you go home. In your fifteen minute presentation, we recommend that you begin by reading your "Dear Students..." paragraph, then briefly describe the focus and scope of your learning community program and your learning community program outcomes, followed by the information compiled in section D above—what you want to do and by when. In addition to presenting the table, we encourage you to explain why you have selected the "good practices" you have, and invite your colleagues' feedback on your choices.

## PART FIVE: FOLLOW-UP CAMPUS SITE VISIT

Washington Center co-directors will help you arrange a campus visit to strengthen the work you have started at the institute. This long-standing practice grows out of institutes in 1998-2004, when grant funding partially offset the cost for these consultations. Evaluation of the grant-funded projects demonstrated the value of follow-up visits, so we continue this practice. In an effort to keep site visits costs low, we recommend a standard fee for honoraria (\$750 per day per person). In addition to honoraria, campuses pay travel, accommodation, and per diem costs. We are pleased to work with you to find consultants who are reasonably close to your campus. (Note: when additional workshops are added to the site visit, additional fees may be required.)

Site visits are most effective when they are planned at strategic times—when you are completing a phase of the work you are proposing in your plan, or beginning a new initiative. If you think your campus might be interested in a site visit, please let us know (via this application, or email close to the time needed)